

MASS MEDIA THEORY AND WOMEN'S ZINES ON
THE WORLD WIDE WEB

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MASS MEDIA THEORY AND WOMEN'S ZINES ON
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ABSTRACT

Two mass media theories—Spiral of Silence theory and Uses and Gratifications theory—have been used to explain and evaluate media usage from a feminist perspective. These theories both succeed and fail when used to analyze the World Wide Web as a mass medium. In order to effectively examine so-called “fringe” groups and their publications on the Web, a new theory is needed that considers the more user-driven interface that the Internet and the World Wide Web provide for users.

Using a modest case study of women’s Web zines, (online underground magazines) this paper attempts to show how some young women use the World Wide Web to publish a different proportion of ideas and opinions than those currently available in the mainstream mass media, and goes on to show that the two current mass media theories used most by feminists are inadequate for the study of the World Wide Web as a mass medium. This paper takes into consideration historical theoretical approaches to the mass media, as well as the social constructionist principles important to looking at the media from a feminist point of view. Finally, it lays a framework of theoretical assumptions that should be considered when examining the Web as a mass medium.

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To Dr. Pamela C. Wagaman

INTRODUCTION

Two mass media theories — Spiral of Silence and Uses and Gratifications — have been used to explain and evaluate media usage from a feminist perspective (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 36; Cragan and Shields, 1998, p. 262). These theories both succeed and fail when used to analyze the Internet as a mass medium. In order to effectively evaluate so-called “fringe” groups and their participation on the World Wide Web, a new theoretical approach is needed that takes into consideration the different satisfaction that the Web provides for users.

Spiral of Silence theory can be defined by five basic assumptions laid out by Cragan and Shields (1998). These assumptions argue that the media creates a mainstream society in which people who do not find confirmation of their ideas within the media will change their ideas in an effort to gain acceptance from society.

These theoretical approaches fail in the evaluation of women’s zines on the Web, because the Web is a new mass medium that is completely user-driven. The Web is not consumed like television or radio, because users must pick sites they wish to view, read those sites and choose where they wish to go next. In addition, the Web offers an easier medium through which the general public can publish. Web sites can be in the form of commercial sites, homepages, or zines, and do not have to rely on commercial support for survival. In general, print magazines must rely on commercial support (with some exceptions). But, basic assumptions of Spiral of Silence theory must be maintained in order to evaluate the ideas and background people bring with them to the World Wide Web. Additionally, Spiral of Silence theory is an important tool with which to evaluate other, older forms of media that may affect the way women use the Web as they move from one form of media to another.

Uses and Gratifications theory can be defined by five assumptions laid out by Rubin

(1993). This theory describes a more active approach to the media. Users choose the type of media they wish to consume based on a set of needs they wish to fulfill. Rubin argues that media must compete with many other influences, and concludes that people are generally more influential than the media in people's formation of opinions.

Although this theory fits Web use more comfortably than any other, Uses and Gratifications lacks explanation of why small groups rebel against the mainstream media. In addition, the Uses and Gratifications approach to the media assumes that the user knows what her needs are, and does not consider the social constructionist view that is important in explaining women and other minorities' media use. This theory does not explain from where these needs are derived, i.e. socially, culturally or mass-mediated.

This paper evaluates content of a selection of women's zines online to illustrate a fringe group's use of the Web. Zines are small publications produced by non-professional people to express thoughts and ideas that are important to them. The bulk of zines in the United States are produced by young people and distributed through friends or at social functions (Chu, 1998, p. 71). Zine content is then briefly compared to the content of a small selection of more traditional women's magazines.

Through the example of women's zines on the Web, this paper will show how ideas from each of these two theories can be pieced together to build a more holistic theoretical approach to the Web as a mass medium by looking at what women are actually publishing in their own zines versus what is produced for them in print magazines. In particular, I will use examples from women's zines on the Web to show how young women are combining social issues and feminist ideas with fashion and advice to create a new kind of publication they do not find in the mainstream media.

As the World Wide Web expands at a seemingly unstoppable rate, and thus begins to

emerge as a pervasive mass medium, researchers must redefine ways of analyzing this medium in order to effectively evaluate its use and its effects on society. I propose four assumptions from which to begin such an analysis.

First, women are both active and passive users of media. Women create their own media as well as consume media provided through the mainstream. Second, the different, more user-driven, interface of the Web allows women to take a more active role in creating media for themselves. Third, socially constructed ideas about media affect the information that women produce in their own media. And finally, the Web provides a new technology through which women can change not only the information that is published for them, but also the way they interact with the media.

Statement of Purpose

Existing theoretical approaches were designed to analyze current forms of media including television, print, and radio. They do not allow for perspectives on use, and on social and historical influences. Social constructionism from a feminist perspective as described by van Zoonen (1994, 38) is the idea that women's realities are created by the society in which they live. A person is born into a society. The culture, ideas, and emotions that are acceptable in that society affect the way that person will behave and think, and in turn the way a person behaves and thinks affects their perception of society and culture.

Though these approaches are useful in evaluating the use of the Web, a new approach is needed. A new approach should allow the researcher to look not only at the broad range of media available on the Web, but also at the social and historical perspectives that have made the Web — and the people who publish on the Web — who and what they are. As described by Hilf (1998), the Web must be analyzed differently than other media because it does not provide a new technology, such as television and radio did at their advent, but

rather it combines many existing technologies and makes them accessible in the same place.

He explains,

Whenever a new medium has emerged, both society and industry have used models of former media as measuring sticks, comparing the new entrant to the standards, successes, and failures of the old. It's natural to use those things familiar — those things comfortable — when making comparisons to new elements in life. In the past, mass media such as print, film, radio and broadcast television developed, in part, due to both the inefficiencies and gold-mine prosperity of pre-existing media. With the development of multimedia (CD-ROM content, interactive film and video, PC and console games, edutainment, movie-ride films, interactive kiosks, virtual reality devices, etc.) we saw how all of the pre-existing media types came crashing, or converging, together into a collage of media elements, (p. 3).

With this in mind, I am attempting to re-examine existing theories, and evaluate their usefulness in analyzing new media.

In my analysis section, I suggest ways in which these theories are useful or not to the study of women's zines on the Web. Finally, I suggest a framework for beginning a new theoretical approach to studying the Web as a mass medium.

METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the Web as a new medium that allows feminist and other groups freedom to present their ideas, one must first show that content on the Web differs from content that is currently available in other media, and so I chose to compare women's zines on the Web with women's print magazines. Both are published on a regular basis (excepting some irregularities with women's Web zines which will be discussed below), and both are geared towards a young, single, female readership.

Three women's print magazines were chosen, as well as three women's Web zines. In order to ensure reliable data, analysis of several print magazines and Web zines was necessary to determine which zines and magazines would be appropriate for the study. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour* and *Mademoiselle* had the largest circulation of women's magazines in 1998. Although *Vogue*, was higher than *Mademoiselle* in single copy sales, *Mademoiselle* was only third behind, and ranked higher for average circulation (ABC, 1998). Other women's magazines ranked higher for circulation and single copy sales, including *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Family Circle* and *Ladies Home Journal*, but these magazines are not geared toward the same age group as Web zines. *Cosmopolitan*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Glamour* all focus on beauty, fashion and love and are targeted at women with an average age of 30. These magazines were chosen for this study because this is the same audience that is producing women's Web zines (Ganahl, 1998, p. 5).

The Web zines chosen for this project were selected from a listing on the site *Chick Click* (<http://www.chickclick.com>). This site was chosen in 1998, as it was the most comprehensive listing of young women's sites on the Web at that time. Other sites have formed since, but were built with the mission of creating a profit (Ganahl, 1998). At its conception, *Chick Click* was a not-for-profit site, although since the decision by the

researcher to use the site, *Chick Click* has become a commercial site.

To ensure valid comparison, Web sites were chosen according to how often they are updated and the number of articles they produce. The print magazines that were chosen publish on a monthly basis. Web zines linked from *Chick Click* were visited regularly for a period of six months to ensure regular updates. Three sites *Maxi Mag* (<http://www.maximag.com>), *Hissy Fit* (<http://www.hissyfit.com>) and *Smile and Act Nice* (<http://www.smileandactnice.com>) were chosen because these sites were the most regularly updated on a monthly basis (similar to the print magazines).

To show how content in women's zines differs from that of the traditional mass media, I conducted a short content analysis of the three Web zines and three national circulation women's magazines and compared the results (Figures 1 and 2). I then analyzed two theories used to study the mass media: Spiral of Silence and Uses and Gratifications.

Content analysis as defined by Krippendorff (1980) "is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p. 21). Two prevalent types of content analysis exist in the literature — quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative content analysis, as defined by Smith, "deals with duration and frequency of form" (quoted in Berg, 1998, p. 224). Such analysis is useful in some instances, but is problematic when looking at what women are publishing on the Web. In order to compare what women are publishing on the Web, versus what they are reading in women's magazines, I chose qualitative content analysis. Such analysis allows the researcher to delve into meaning rather than numerical data. As explained by Berg (1998) in reference to qualitative content analysis,

From this perspective, content analysis is not a reductionistic, positivistic approach. Rather, it is a passport to listening to the words of the text, and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words (p. 225).

Berg (1998) also discusses the issues of latent versus manifest content analysis.

Manifest content analysis is that which is physically present and quantifiable, while latent content is that which is interpreted through reading and symbolism. He recommends,

...when latent symbolism may be discussed, researchers should offer detailed excerpts from relevant statements (messages) that serve to document the researchers' interpretations. A safe rule of thumb to follow is the inclusion of at least three independent examples for each interpretation (p. 226).

To summarize, qualitative content analysis was chosen to review these publications because it is the most effective method to show what these publications are producing, which in turn reflects on the position and values of the publishers, and hence their views of the readers.

Six categories were chosen to describe the articles in the zines and magazines. Each category resembles what Krippendorff (1980) describes as referential units. "Units may be defined by particular objects, events, persons, acts, countries, or ideas to which an expression refers" (p. 61). Categories for this project were derived through analysis of the main topics of articles found in the magazines and zines. Lists were made of several types of magazine and zine article types, and then narrowed down by eliminating overlapping categories. Article content from each issue was taken and coded as follows:

- 1. Fashion:** Articles labeled fashion discussed issues about clothing, accessories or beauty products or the latest in beauty treatment products by brand name.
- 2. Relationships:** Articles discussing partner habits, sexuality (from a personal rather than political perspective) and dating were coded in this category.
- 3. Social Issues:** Articles discussing current social problems, politics or feminism. Articles such as these did not contain direct advice (i.e. follow these simple steps to get what you want) nor do they actually discuss social issues.
- 4. Advice:** Articles that professed to give information on obtaining things or succeeding in certain areas. These included information on how to get men,

and what the best methods to reduce acne are.

5. Media: Articles discussing books, movies, television, Internet sites or celebrities.

6. Other: Any articles that did not fit in the above categories. These articles included segments on food, and those that did not appropriately discuss other subjects such as articles containing testimonials (*How I dealt with a Double Mastectomy*), rather than discussions of the issue.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this content analysis. First, the number of sites that are updated regularly limited the size of the Web sample, because many Web zines are not commercial. Print magazines are commercial and produced by a paid staff. This results in regular publication not always possible with the small volunteer staff available to zine publishers. I chose three zines that were updated regularly, and also the three most popular print magazines. The small number of existing Web zines also limited my sample for comparison.

Qualitative content analysis has limitations. Hammersley (1992) lays out three elements for ensuring validity in qualitative research. "Validity is identified with confidence in our knowledge but not certainty... Reality is assumed to be independent of the claims that researchers make about it, and reality is always viewed through particular perspectives; hence our accounts represent reality, they do not reproduce it" (p. 50-51).

Content analysis can only show what these particular publications are producing. From the data, it can be seen that the zines are producing more articles on social issues than print magazines. It can also be seen that the print magazines and the zines are producing similar content, but in different ratios. Without a psychological or ethnographic study of the

editors, no conclusions can be drawn as to why these differences in content exist. This relates to the second element listed above concerning reality. This study is only a small snapshot of these publications; a more lengthy study may produce different conclusions.

Another limitation to the study is the fact that the zines chosen were chosen because they were updated regularly and all of these zines appeared to have some commercial support. Many of the smaller zines without commercial support may provide different insights into what women are publishing on the Web. But, comparing these zines to print magazines provides some difficult problems. Many of these zines may appear only once, never to be updated. Others do not provide article titles, but are instead organized in a rather scattered sense that does not resemble the print magazine. By conducting this study with the zines that were chosen, the researcher was able to show the different ratios of content between Web and print. A further study using content analysis on other zines, even those produced less frequently, might provide more insight into the differences between Web and print publications.

The Web is a new medium. The future of Web publishing is unknown. But, it can be shown that women are using this medium now to produce content different from that in print magazines.

BACKGROUND

In order to understand the World Wide Web, and its growth in modern life, one must look at the history of the medium. The Web has grown from a programmer's toy to a commercial enterprise in a short period of time. The history of this medium, in addition to the history of zines, is important in understanding the theoretical approaches. The underground press has been in existence since print media began. Zines are a modern outgrowth of this underground press. They are cheap, and easy to produce with today's technology, making them accessible to young people. The World Wide Web has offered an expansion to the zine publishing industry. With access to the Internet, any person can easily produce information on the Web and make it accessible to anyone in the world. The following is a brief background on the Internet, the Web, cyberfeminism, and zines, that shows how young women have moved onto the Web to publish their ideas.

Internet and the World Wide Web

By the 1970s, the Internet had become important to scientists who needed to communicate across the country and around the world. Instant communication through messages sent by computer allowed scientists to accomplish experiments and exchange information at a much faster pace. Software was designed to handle what we know today as email, and computers were connected to a network across the country. Yet even during these early stages, scientists found ways to use the Internet to communicate on a more social level. The first mailing list on the Internet was not for scientific endeavor, but rather for science fiction fans (Glibert & Kile, 1996).

Once the Internet became public technology, communication grew at a rapid pace. Early interaction on the Internet was centered around a bulletin board service called the WELL. Bulletin board services were early computer services on which people could leave messages and responses, or initiate private discussions through email.

Since the design of Mosaic in 1993, a program that allowed for easy browsing of text and graphics, the Internet has grown quickly into what we know today as the World Wide Web (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Over 93 million people now “log on” to the Web on a daily basis (Computer Industry Almanac, 1999). Children and adults access masses of information through personal computers in their homes.

The availability of the Web has posed new challenges to the study of mass media. Not only is the Internet a new medium for the distribution of information, it provides a tool by which people can combine many forms of media into one. With access to a computer, Web users can read magazines and newspapers as well as watch television and movies and listen to the radio and music. Through Web technology, the Internet has the potential to create new methods of communication as well as change the way people access, distribute and consume information.

The Internet’s decentralized structure provides its users with the ability to receive, create, and send information in many forms, including electronic mail, Usenet news groups, Listserv mailing lists, simulation spaces, and World Wide Web sites. Most of these are in the public domain and foster a concept of the Internet as home to many virtual communities of interest (Lindolf & Shatzer, 1998, p. 170).

As programs were designed to handle graphics and different forms of text, the Internet developed into the World Wide Web as we know it today. Service providers sprung up around the country, which made access to the network much cheaper. A committee was established to regulate the Internet worldwide, and that committee later decided to impose a \$50 fee for domain names of commercial enterprises. Educational (.edu) and governmental (.gov) names remained free of charge, but all other domain names now require a fee (Gilbert & Kile, 1996).

Perhaps the most important event in making the Web what it is today is its commercial use. Although educational and government resources flourish on the Web,

commercial sites have transformed its look and feel. Banners and advertisements commonly appear luring potential customers to other sites where consumers can purchase goods and services. Programmers designed “cookies” that can be delivered into user’s computers, bringing important consumer information back to companies and small businesses and allowing sites to personalize sales pitches. Television and radio stations carry advertisements for Web sites, and the stock market has adopted the slang “dot com” companies, referring to IT companies that experience enormous growth over a short period of time.

The Web continues to grow, and the price of personal computers is dropping, allowing more and more users to get online. Cafés now provide computers for users to “surf the Web” for a nominal fee. Some companies even give away computers to encourage consumers to pay for online service from them. Computer use is now common.

Although, the Web continues to be a predominantly white, upper class, male environment, recent surveys have shown that women’s Web use is on the rise. In 1998 the average user was a white male between the ages of 25 and 35 with a college education and an annual income between \$30,000 and \$60,000 a year. At that time, women made up only about 35% of online users, and minorities only about 3% (Lin, 1998). In 1999, the number of U.S. women on the Web rose 32%, while male users rose only 20 %. Today, male users tend to spend more over-all time online, while female users tend to spend more time shopping online (Nua, 2000, p. 3).

Critics such as Lin (1998) claim that the Web is only for the wealthy and forces women and minorities once again out of the picture. Yet women have made their presence known on the Web. A new breed of feminist — cyberfeminists — have introduced Web pages and established communities on the Web from the early days of the bulletin board

services. Sadie Plant, director of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick, England, argues that women are meant for new computer technologies. Her book, *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (1997), traces the roots of women and computing back to the early days of weaving. She argues that the first adding machines were designed after the loom and emphasizes women like Ada Lovelace, who assisted in the design of the differential machine, one of the very first computers. Plant attempts to show that the intuitive nature of computing is more natural to women than men.

Sadie Plant and other feminists have used the Web to make themselves known and find others like themselves. One of the most important aspects of the Web is that it allows smaller “subcultures” to establish themselves and provide information and discussion to the public. Smaller web zines like *Geek Girl* (<http://www.geekgirl.com>) encourage the subculture of these cyberfeminists by publishing articles and interviews about them. Plant (1997) explains, “Access to a terminal is also access to resources which were once restricted to those with the right face, accent, race, sex, none of which now need be declared. ...a channel-hopping mode facilitated and demanded by information which is no longer bound together in linear texts or library classifications...” (p. 46).

Such a phenomenon allowed the Web to grow to the point that commercialization was possible. Through commercialization, the Web has expanded its uses and become a place for armchair shopping and a portal for advertisements (Leiner et al., 1999, p. 1). People can learn about anything in the comfort of their own homes and without the risk of having to identify themselves or explain their interest to friends and family, while advertisers can target more specific audiences and lure Web users to commercial sites.

The idea of a global community has helped the Web become the social and political force it is today. People around the world (at least those who have the financial and

educational resources) can share information and ideas quickly and at relatively low cost. The National Aeronautical and Space Administration has aided in the establishment of new educational technologies for the Web and encouraged children's involvement in the new technology. Organizations such as Microsoft have sponsored classrooms around the world to share in environmental information on a central Website to help them learn about the world in which they live (Dr. Susan Hoban, Acting Associate Director, USRA Center of Excellence in Space Data and Information Science, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, personal communication, January 28, 1999).

The Web continues to grow. Users log-on anonymously from around the world. This anonymity allows people to express their ideas without fear of repercussions from their immediate community. As technology increases and programs for Web design and browsing become more user friendly, the Web will become even more universal.

Women in Print

In order to understand the origin of women's zines on the Web, one must look at the history of zines in modern society. These publications have played a crucial role in young people's subcultures over the past 20 years. A definition of zines taken from publishers of some of the prevalent publications by Chu (1998) follows:

Zine: A small handmade amateur publication done purely out of passion, rarely making money or breaking even. Sounds like zeen. Not short for magazine or written with an apostrophe ('zine), though the derivation is from the word "fanzine."

—R. Seth Friedman (1996), publisher of *Factsheet Five* (quoted in Chu, 1998, p. 71).

[Zines are] where the action is, where information (and disinformation) is free...the few thousand publishers and the few million readers are the ones at the cutting edge of social change.

— Mike Gunderloy (1990), founder of *Factsheet Five* and author of *The World of Zines* (quoted in Chu, 1998, p.71).

Zines emerged in the mid-80s as a popular form of expression among teenagers. A zine is a small independently produced piece of writing or collection of writings. Zines are usually not high-quality publications but instead are published by young people with any money they might be able to raise.

Zines are a means for many young people to express disgust, excitement or any opinions they might have about society and life. As Julie Chu explains in her 1998 article *How Youths Claim a Place through Zines*, they are a way for young people with little power in society to express control over their environment, which gives them a feeling of power. She continues:

The above image ["I won't play girl to your boy NO MORE" (Sudata, 1996, p. 3)] also illustrates the extent to which zines provide young publishers a space to re-envision the power dynamics of their larger social environments. As much as they are critiques of mainstream media, zines also point to the media as one of the last hopeful environments where young people can assert a sense of agency by redefining a social space in otherwise constraining material circumstances (p. 72).

A zine may argue political issues, talk about bands, or just tell a personal story. Many abound with profanity—another way for young people to rebel. Zines are often compared to the underground press, in the sense that historically groups unable to get attention in the mainstream media have used small publications and pamphlets to distribute information about their cause (Kessler, 1984, p. 154). The difference between the underground press and zines is that zines are a newer phenomenon that are published mainly by younger people to rebel against an increasingly more commercially controlled media.

Publishing alternative ideas is not a new concept. Kessler describes how feminists historically published underground newsletters to both establish their identity as well as spread their message.

Only through these alternative means could feminists be assured an outlet for their

ideas. From the first women's crusade of the 1840's to the current movement of the 1980's, feminist newspapers and periodicals have been the backbone of the on-going women's movement. Serving as organizational tools, morale boosters, consciousness-raisers, philosophical and political forums, and propaganda organs, hundreds of these journals have helped wage the battle for equality (1984, p. 74).

Women's use of the Web can also be described as an extension of the feminist underground press. Feminist publications began to flourish in the late '60s and early '70s, partially fueled by the creation of NOW, the National Organization for Women. NOW formed in 1966 to educate society about women's issues. Through NOW's publicity and public relations efforts with the mass media, the feminist agenda became apparent not just as an underground movement but as a national concern. Smith (1993) explains:

Women's movement media grew out of a historical period characterized not only by the richness of its protest and dissent, but also for its desire for alternative ways of living and working: an estimated 5,000 alternative grassroots cooperative businesses were reported as of 1976. The formation of these grassroots businesses was particularly prolific in fields requiring low capital needs. The development of low-cost offset printing, plus the use of typewriters and transfer lettering, made the publishing venture highly feasible to feminist groups with little capital (p. 65).

Following the height of the feminist movement during the '60s and '70s, women joined the growing force of the underground press in larger numbers (Kessler, 1984). Small magazines, usually printed on a copy machine and stapled together, circulated through U.S. cities. These publications discussed feminist ideas and published fiction and poetry by women. During the late 1980's and early 1990's many of these publications grew out of the punk movement's production of "fanzines." Young women produced zines that lacked editing and high-end graphics, but gave these women a place to complain, argue and create in an uncensored manner (Chu, 1998, p. 78).

The key to this concept of the zine is the lack of censorship. These publications usually emerged out of someone's home and were passed on to friends or given away at

concerts. Editors welcomed comment from readers but rarely conformed to the standards of the mass media. Zines discussed subjects that were considered too taboo for the broader media and allowed women to curse and argue without the worry of commercial censorship.

In addition, zines are not commercially supported — a primary difference between women's zines and their printed counterparts. As described by Finders (1996), women's printed magazines offer an assortment of articles that are surprisingly similar to advertisements.

Articles and advertisements look remarkably alike. Articles often times are presented as whole-page photos with a column on the left that details the dress complete with designer names and suggested retail prices (p. 83).

Yet in recent years zines have drawn more attention from the mainstream media, often to the dismay of zine publishers who pride themselves on publishing anti-mainstream ideas (Chu, 1998, p. 77).

So continues the feminist publication tradition on the Web. With sufficient financial resources, women are able to post their own sites in the form of magazines, chat rooms and newsletters for access by anyone with a computer. These sites give advice and post resources for women to connect with other women and share ideas. Yet despite the abundance of women's sites and feminist agendas on the Web, feminist issues are still absent from the mainstream mass media. This absence raises some important theoretical questions. If women are continually silenced by a mass media controlled by a dominant patriarchal system, where will women's place be on the World Wide Web as it gains dominance as a universal medium? Will these women's zines begin to take the form of national women's magazines? If women have sites to provide feminist information and networking, will women use these sites as a source of information?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As shown, computer producers are becoming aware of women as a potential market for their products (Hammel, 1999). Women have historically had a difficult relationship with computers. Researchers such as Oberta Furger, author of *Does Jane Compute?* (1998), argue that women do not become involved with computers because they do not find their social needs fulfilled through a monitor and a hard drive. The Web has been an important tool in changing this. From the beginning, women have staked a claim on the Internet. Women on the WELL, or WOW, allowed women a place in the midst of hundreds of discussion groups ranging from the Grateful Dead to computer programming. In order to join WOW, users had to telephone the moderator to prove they were in fact female. It was not uncommon for early computer lists to be selective in their membership. As has been shown in many studies of online communities (Garton, Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1997; Bechar, 1995; Danet, 1996; Bruckman, 1992) anonymity is an important factor in online communication. This caused many problems in early women's listservs and groups, because men were able to join in on conversations and change dynamics (Camp, 1996). Weise (1996), describes her experience as a woman in the mostly male field of computer programming and finding WOW.

I came into the community with a cry of pain, feeling alone and bereft, and these women I did not know sat down beside me and offered comfort, told their own stories of breakups and partings, of finding their way in a new city, of making a life where you did not have one before. Every night while I ate my dinner under the fluorescent lights, I would read the stories of their daily triumphs and frustrations – and a traffic ticket, a new pair of pants that actually fit, boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands and children, what to do about bullies at school, how a leach field for a septic tank really works (p. xi).

Furger (1998) studied pre-teen and teenage girls to find out how their use of the Web changed both their relationship with computer technology and their normal social interactions. She found that girls became more interested in computers when they

discovered that they could exchange email with friends around the country and converse in chat rooms. Most importantly, she found that many girls enjoyed the freedom of participating in online conversations in which others did not know their sex or age, and thus the girls were only judged on their expressions of thoughts and ideas.

Online, girls aren't judged solely by their clothes, their looks, or their age. They're judged by their ideas and their ability to communicate them. Many girls revel in the newfound freedom to express themselves and have conversations with adults who actually listen to their thoughts, to just be themselves. "I get to meet a lot of adults online," says Susy. "They accept what I'm saying much more than if I were talking to them face to face," she adds, noting, "and they're always surprised when they find out my age" (p. 71).

In the years following the fantastic growth of the Web from a computer programmer's toy to a vital part of modern life, women's participation with computers has changed and grown. Entrepreneurs recognize women as the way into America's wallet, and marketing campaigns are geared more and more towards bringing women onto the Web. In the June, 1998 *Vanity Fair*, a Microsoft ad pictured a gender neutral person working on a laptop computer. The caption tells the reader that "Windows is the part of the machine that is human," thus implying that Microsoft products know no gender.

In addition, a proliferation of new women's sites have appeared on the Web in the last five years. Corporations have begun creating sites to entice female surfers and thus profit from advertisers eager to corner the market on women's purchases. Ivillage.com offers advice for women in areas ranging from finance to childcare alongside chat rooms for women to share thoughts and exchange ideas (Hammel, 1999). The price for these web sites are the pervasive advertisements that change with each click of a button.

Outside of these corporate-sponsored sites lie less commercial ventures begun by women not out to make money but rather to create a place for themselves on the Web

(Ganahl, 1998). *Amazon City* (<http://www.amazoncity.com>) provides networks for women to chat, shop, share ideas, and post information pertinent to women's issues. In addition, it links to other women's sites on the web such as *Riotgrrls*, *Chick Click*, *Gurl*, *Hues*, *Maxi*, and others, which offer women resources in particular areas of interest, especially concerning political views, race and sexual orientation. These sites have earned increased attention by women aged 20 to 30 in the last few years as their readership has grown at a steady pace (Ganahl, 1998; Grossman, 1999; Hammel, 1999). The difference in these sites lies in the fact that they were not commercially supported when they began. This often sets the content of these zines apart from their commercial counterparts.

France (1997) states:

Minx [another Web-based women's publication] is part of a small explosion of female oriented Web sites, created for the most part by and for women in their 20's. Conceived in the same no-profit do-it-yourself spirit as photocopied homemade fanzines, they are more raw, spirited, and subversive than they are professional. ...there is almost no other form of media right now that provides more insight into the various concerns and priorities of young women, that come straight from the source, unhampered by commercial interest (p. 102).

Lindolf and Shatzer (1998, p. 172) argue that media use emerges out of "a dialectic of personal agency and social constraint." Along these lines, young women's zines have moved to the Web. With the help of a personal computer and a modem, young women can publish ideas that may potentially reach millions of viewers. But, if women are to successfully use the Web as a medium of strength within a broader framework of the mass media, then more women will have to become computer literate. Women must have access to computers as well as the ability and training to use the Web to obtain and post information. This means that society must encourage women to understand and use computers if they are to become part of women's reality. In other words, it must become as socially acceptable for women to be computer literate as for men, if women are to

establish a position of equality on the Web. Janelle Brown of *Salon Magazine*, a web-based publication, states “That women are vastly underrepresented in the upper ranks of the high-tech industry is nothing new—even the more eclectic *Wired* 25 list... included only three women (none, incidentally actually in technology)” (1998, p. 2). As shown by Steeves (1993), this issue has been argued by many feminist activists looking to encourage women in computer use.

Of course, computers can facilitate networking via newsletters... But computers also make possible direct, inexpensive, two way information transfers. Judy Smith and Ellen Balka (1988) argue that computer literacy is crucial for women’s empowerment in a technological world. Of course, such empowerment means overcoming the computer “reticence” that afflicts many women (Turkle, 1988) – plus other obstacles to women’s training and access, including discrimination in education and cost (p. 52).

Still, studies show that women are not equally as interested in computers as men. Turkle (1988) looked at why women often reject new technologies. She deduced that women “use their rejection of computers to assert something about themselves as women... it is a way to say that it is not appropriate to have a close relationship with a machine.” (quoted in van Zoonen, 1994, p. 124) On the other hand, cyberfeminists argue that women are innately conditioned to be successful on computers. Scholars such as Sadie Plant argue this through showing women’s history in the field of computing and where women are today.

I actually started off to do as a sort of draw-out of the influence women have had on computing, thinking that it was quite small and minimal when I started, but in fact the more work I’ve done on this, I have become really convinced that in fact computing has been built almost lock, stock and barrel by women. All of the machinery that feeds into it, for example the typewriter, telephone, calculating machines, everything has always been operated by women. Clearly the men had been organizing that activity, but now this cultural sea change we are seeing is partly because that organizing role is diminishing. To be the organizer is no longer to be the most important factor. That’s why it’s such an overwhelming threat, that really pulls the rug from under the feet of the existing set-up (M, 1996, p. 11).

Yet the reality of the situation is the question of who is logging on to the Internet, and how those people use the Internet to access the information they need. As televisions were expensive in the early days of that medium, computers are expensive today. Not all people have access to computers at home or through work. Lin (1998) states that

...industry research reports that married couples with children under the age of 18 are the households most likely to have personal computers, accounting for 44% of the home computer market in 1994. Another industry survey discovers that “techthusiasts” tend to be younger babyboomers (with a median age of 38), affluent (with a median household income of \$56,000) and better educated (with more than 14 years of school) relative to average Americans (p. 98).

Another study by John Perry Barlow (1995) suggests “Internet users tend to be white males under 50 with plenty of computer time. Users are less likely to be women, children, old people, poor people, the blind, the illiterate, and people from the continent of Africa” (p. 54).

Despite these odds, women’s zines continue to claim space on the Web. These sites provide a forum for discussion and the spread of information about subjects that are not readily available within the mass media. Where women have fought for years for inclusion and proper representation in television, news and radio, through the Web, women are able to represent themselves and provide their own information on subjects they deem important. Some researchers think this may be the reason younger women flock to the Web. For instance France (1997) states

Women who grew up in the shadow of feminism have been accused – not entirely without justification – of turning their backs on the cause and focusing on personal gain as opposed to unification. ...they demonstrate a growing desire among postboomer women to reconcile feminism and femininity, to throw fashion, politics and sex into the mix, and to do it from an undogmatic but nonetheless womancentric point of view. While mainstream feminists continue to duke it out over the big issues, these young women are employing this new form of communication to weigh in on everything from beauty products to sexual harassment in the military (p. 102).

All the while, researchers continue to criticize women's printed magazines, calling them exploitive and misrepresentational (Starr, 1999). Yet other printed magazines have emerged that portray women in a positive light. *Ms.*, first published in 1972, explores social issues and feminist ideas. But magazines such as this have struggled to continue publishing, while mainstream women's magazines sustain huge profits (Farrell, 1998).

Ganahl (1998), in a description of *Chick Click* and *Estronet*, states:

Both sites emanate the same vibe - cheeky, youthful and female-positive. It's real information by and for the anti-Cosmo-girl crowd. ...And up until recently, the majority of women's sites were devoted to such things as shopping and beauty aids - more traditional magazine-type fodder.

Chick Click links up to a riotous variety of pages for numerous purposes. Everything from Riotgrrl (the site where you can force-feed supermodels either steak or SlimFast), to Disgruntled Housewife, home of the famous Dick List (first names of rotten ex's) to GrrlGamer, where you can play a game that allows you to "frag" (set on fire) a video version of Lara Croft, the sexy heroine (hated by feminists) of the Tomb Raider game (p. 6).

Theoretical Framework

Spiral of Silence Theory

Noelle-Neumann introduced the Spiral of Silence theory in defense of the Third Reich (Simpson, 1996). By looking at the success and popularity of Hitler's ideas to the German people, Noelle-Neumann described the media as an all-powerful agent over its viewers. Spiral of Silence theory (SST) explains how the media, controlled by a minority yet dominant power, can dictate the opinions of the majority.

Cragan and Shields (1998) describe the assumptions laid out by Noelle-Neumann in five steps. First, society threatens deviant individuals with isolation. Second, individuals experience continuous fear of isolation. Third, fear of isolation causes individuals to continually assess the climate of public opinion. Fourth, the results of an individual's estimates affect the disclosure or concealment of opinion. And finally, these assumptions

together explain the formation, defense and alteration of public opinion (p. 262).

This theory portrays the media as successful in changing public opinion by arguing that people believe that opinions they see in the media are the norm. Thus people constantly test their opinions against those they see in the media and change their opinions to be consistent with what they see. Thus, if people find that their viewpoint is not represented by the media, they will change their viewpoint hoping to “fit in” with the rest of society.

Noelle-Neumann also argues that three factors: cumulation, ubiquity, and consonance, combine to produce the powerful effects the mass media has on public opinion (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 305). Cumulation means that prolonged exposure to the mass media will result in a kind of build-up of effects. Years of exposure to news shows giving only certain stories and opinions will lead to viewers that believe those opinions are the majority. Ubiquity refers to the omnipresence of the media in society. News shows run the same information everywhere. News magazines are also nationally distributed. Due to a lack of local news coverage, people will form similar opinions about the same issues across countries and perhaps globally. Consonance refers to the “unified picture of an event or issue that can develop and is often shared by different newspapers, magazines, television networks and other media” (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 305). The media often gives the same pictures of an event, and interviews the same people. Opinions that deviate from the norm are not given. Thus, stories about the same events and giving the same information are broadcast on many channels and written in many papers and magazines.

Feminists argue Noelle-Neumann’s theory indirectly, by relating social constructionism with the dominant paradigm of the mass media. According to van Zoonen (1994), social constructionism is the way in which society and culture affect the

way humans perceive events and conduct our lives.

...society exists as both objective and subjective reality. While we perceive the world we live in as 'real,' as something that exists beyond our own perceptions and beliefs and that will continue to exist when we are not there, we acknowledge at the same time that not everyone perceives reality in the same way. Still, it is not merely that people perceive reality in a particular way, their perception has consequences for their sense of self, relations with others, their mode of conduct and a whole range of other social practices. In these social interactions people produce, reproduce and adjust definitions of reality (p. 38).

People create their own reality and this is carried over into how these people establish and maintain this reality, both within themselves and with the rest of the world. Because society maintains a set of assumptions about male and female behavior, these assumptions are learned and reinforced through interactions, and consequently also reinforced by the media, which is a reflection of society. Ideas carried over from the Enlightenment created a notion of gender in European society. That notion is passed on to each child and reinforced in our language and habits (Creedon, 1993). As explained by Steeves (1993),

[We now] live in a culture built on a particular set of gender assumptions and structured to amplify if not produce gender asymmetries and inequalities, and we come to view these differences as part of the natural world (p. 49).

From a feminist perspective, mass media in the United States is exactly the structure that Noelle Neumann describes. National news shows broadcast similar stories on the same nights, local newspapers share information through the Associated Press, often using the exact stories. National magazines also follow one another's trends, publishing stories that are already being covered in other mass media, and thus reinforcing the same opinions. The media, not of its own fault but rather by default, is run by people trained by a society that enforces gender stereotypes and inequalities.

Traditional women's magazines have been criticized for presenting a "mass mediated" view of women (van Zoonen, 1994, 35). National magazines focus on make-

up, heterosexual love, and a distorted view of thin white women as the ideal and indeed the majority. These magazines provide the same views to all women who buy them, enforcing a belief that women should uphold such images. SST maintains that these images persist because women look to them as examples of ideals, and sublimate contradictory views.

Uses and Gratifications

The Uses and Gratifications approach to media study takes a completely different view of the audience than Spiral of Silence theory. Uses and Gratification (UGT) sees audience members as active participants in the media they consume. Applications of UGT have demonstrated that media not only affect the audience, but the audience can affect the media (Klapper, 1963). Rubin (1993) states that “Audience activity connotes media involvement. It affects the influence of media and messages, and is a crucial concept for explaining media effects” (p. 98).

He describes five assumptions of UGT. First, communication behavior such as media use is typically goal directed or motivated. Such behavior is functional for people; it has consequences for people and societies. Second, people select and use communication sources and messages to satisfy felt needs or desires. Media use is a means to satisfy wants or interests such as seeking information to reduce uncertainty or to solve personal dilemmas. Third, social and psychological factors mediate communication behavior. Behavior is a response to media only as filtered through one’s social and psychological circumstances such as the potential for interpersonal interaction, social categories and personality. Fourth, media compete with other forms of communication for selection, attention and use. There are definite relationships between media and interpersonal communication for satisfying needs or wants. Finally, people are usually more influential than media in media-person relationships (1993, p. 98).

UGT's core concept is audience activity. Blumler (quoted in Rubin, 1993) identified utility, intentionality, selectivity, and imperviousness to influence as aspects of audience activity. Utility refers to the way people use the media. Why do they choose specific media, and what might motivate them to do so? Intentionality refers to people's intentions when consuming a kind of media. Are they looking for information in order to place a vote, or to make a decision? Are they hoping to escape boredom? Selectivity is based on what people may already know or have an opinion of. What a person chooses to watch on television may be related to their personal interests. A person who works as a biological scientist may choose to watch a Nova program on recent research, while a person in the music industry may choose to watch the Grammy Awards. Imperviousness to influence refers to an audience that varies in specific reactions to the media (Rubin, 1993, p. 99).

Some feminist researchers have embraced the Uses and Gratifications approach to mass media study. Looking at what individual women are doing with the media seems to be a more functional approach to women's roles in mass communication because it explains what is happening rather than blaming a dominant power. An important issue raised by such researchers as Steeves (1993) is that women are able to gain power in the media by focusing on creating their own media organizations. Here women become the actors rather than the recipients.

Another important means by which women can resist patriarchal and Western hegemonic influences is to establish their own media organizations. One such organization is the ISIS collective (Women's International Information and Communication Service), based in Santiago and Rome, which uses multiple formats to publish audiovisual material and other information for women around the world (p. 49).

Van Zoonen (1994) describes two studies exploring UGT and women. The first study conducted by Cantor and Pingree (quoted in van Zoonen, 1994, p. 36) found that

women use soap operas to “satisfy the need for emotional release, identification, escape, companionship, information, and relaxation.” Women were using the media, in this case soap operas, to obtain things that they weren’t getting from society. The second study done by Wassenaar (1975), which found that women who read women’s magazines “derive a feeling of friendship from reading,” and “are informed, entertained and advised by women’s magazines” (van Zoonen, 1994, p.36). Starr (1999) states that “Women’s magazines continue to create—and exploit—women’s anxiety,” (p. 8). If women are using zines in this same way, this might indicate a lack of content in what women perceive they need from printed magazines.

RESULTS

Content Analysis

Analysis of the Web zines and women's magazines showed that content of the two media differed greatly. The bulk of articles in the Web zines concentrated first on social issues, and second on media. The categories other, advice, relationships and fashion followed respectively. The bulk of women's magazine articles concentrated on fashion and advice, followed by media, other, relationships and social issues respectively. Figure 1 (p. 52), shows percentages of subject matter for the two types of publications.

Clearly, the women's Web zines focused more on social issues, while that category was the smallest in women's magazines (see figure 1, p. 51). There were significantly fewer articles on advice-giving in the Web zines than in the women's magazines. Although articles on relationships were few in both kinds of publications, those categories were the closest match.

Percentage of article subjects was the most logical way to compare the results in these magazines, because the number of articles in the two kinds of publications differed significantly. Women's magazines contained a greater number of articles per issue than the Web zines.

An example of different treatment of subject matter can be seen in the News Features section of *Cosmopolitan*, as compared to the Scoop section (equivalent to the News Features section) of *Maxi. Cosmopolitan* (March 2000) lists three news feature stories in the issue: *What's a Nice Girl like Christie Doing with O.J. Simpson?*, *I Was Divorced by 25*, and *The Hottest Model in the World*. The first story discusses what the friends and family of Christie Prody think of the 24-year-old's relationship with O.J. Simpson. The second story gives the testimonials of three young divorcees. The third

story gives information on Gisele Bundchen's life as a model. Following is an excerpt from the third story:

Move over, Kate Moss. A new supermodel is rocking the runways, snagging magazine covers, and copping big-time awards like VH1 and Vogue's Model of the Year. She's the curvaceous, sun-kissed goddess named Gisele, and six years after being discovered while chowing down on a Big Mac during a class trip, the 19-year-old has become a worldwide phenomenon (who still digs Mickey D's). Stay tuned for the incredible story of her career and the surprising truth about her two vices, the part of her body that's internationally famous, and where you'll find her on Saturday nights (p. 265).

Maxi also lists three news stories in the *Scoop* section of the zine: *Work That Skirt*, *Norplant Suits to Settle*, and *Jail Time for Voyeurs*. The first story describes a new law passed in Manhattan, New York that demands female correction officers should not wear skirts to work. The second story describes the results of a lawsuit against the makers of Norplant, a birth control device that is implanted in women's arms. The third story describes a new bill passed by California's Governor which mandates jail time for people who film women without their knowledge. Following is an excerpt from the second story:

A reported \$50 million-plus will be paid to more than 36,000 women who suffered from the makers of Norplant to settle claims. The birth control device — hormones released by capsules the size of six matchsticks inserted in the upper arm — is responsible for depression, nausea, irregular menstrual bleeding, and headaches.

After five years of litigation, Norplant's parent company, American Home Products Corp., referred to the settlement as "purely a business decision," and they did not admit any fault nor wrongdoing. Each woman who sued before March 1, 1999 is set to receive \$1,500 which is a mere pittance compared to the side effects they suffered (p. 2).

As can be seen from the two stories, each would be coded differently despite the fact they both are listed as news. One reason for this may be that *Cosmopolitan's* main focus is that of a fashion magazine. But, all the news listed in the *News Features* section of *Cosmopolitan* is not fashion news, showing that the magazine has an interest in providing

stories on subjects other than fashion to its readers. *Maxi's* story, on the other hand, provides the facts about a social issue important to women's health. But, *Maxi* also adds in a bit of editorial review in the last sentence stating "...which is a mere pittance compared to the side effects they suffered," (p. 3). This shows that the editors have somewhat of a slant with respects to their views on certain issues (in this case women's health).

Another apparent difference between the magazines and zines lies in the treatment of relationships. Each of the women's print magazines contained a section about men. *Cosmopolitan* contained a section of articles under the heading *All About Men*, *Mademoiselle* listed several articles including *How to be Smart with your Heart; Is he really good for you?*, *Men: Out-of-sync sleep*, *Mlle Love: Impress His Pals*, and *Glamour* also listed several articles including *Does He Secretly Love you? Sexual Health: In-the-moment sex tips*, and *Have You Had a Mortifying Relationship Moment?* Each of these articles assumed that the reader was heterosexual, and sexually active.

On the other hand, none of the women's zines listed a section about men. *Maxi*, contained one article called *Eat, Drink, Mope, Be Miserable: Ask Maxi Ponders the Post-Breakup Therapy*. This article contained three letters to the editor, two of which were written about heterosexual relationships and another that was not clear. *Smile and Act Nice*, contains a section called *Better Half: Managing the Modern Marriage*, which gives advice on marriage, in a humorous fashion. For example, the heading for the advice column is as follows: "Some days you won't get the busy bee husband. In fact, many days he will drive you to drink with all his moping and bitching. Following is guidance for those days." Thus, the web zines took a different approach to relationship advice-giving than the print magazines.

As can be seen by these examples, both the print magazines and the zines use similar

narrative styles. The edition of the editorial sentence in the news feature listed above makes a strict news story more informal to the reader. The slang present in the *Cosmopolitan* story about the model creates a relaxed mood for the reader. A noted difference in the slang present in the zines versus the slang used in the print magazines is the use of profanity. Chu (1998) showed that zine publishers use such language to express rebellion. Although the same conclusion cannot be drawn from this data, the presence of profanity must be noted.

Examples of cover pages for each of the magazines and zines studied can be found in Appendix I. Additionally, Figure 2, p. 52, lists article titles for comparison.

Theoretical Analysis

The first assumption of Spiral of Silence theory (SST) is that “society threatens deviant individuals with isolation” (Cragan and Shields, 1998, p. 262). This assumption is a problem in the context of the Web. Many women describe cyberspace and the Web as isolated. Online relationships lack any physical interactions such as touch, feel and eye contact. Thus, why would women seek out the Web as a way to fight isolation? Graphics and movies are increasing on the Web but are still not at the same technological level of television or movies. On the other hand, from a textual standpoint, women’s zines are fighting the isolation of opinion just by their existence. The pages present deviant opinion and facts that are not prevalent in the mass media. By their mere existence, the pages provide women who have not found confirmation of their views within the mass media, the confirmation they are seeking.

The second assumption of SST states that “individuals experience continuous fear of isolation”(Cragan and Shields, 1998, p. 262). This assumption provides the base for the remaining three assumptions in SST. Unfortunately, the logical progression no longer works in the framework of the Web. The Web provides an unlimited number of pages for

the production of opinions and information. There are no production limitations as with print media, and the only financial limitations lie in equipment access. Through proper searching, a person is likely to find pages or information validating their viewpoint. Thus the question moves away from whether people can find what they need from the media to why people need what they think they need.

But how will women's activity on the Web be influenced by the inactive viewer and dominant media described in SST? According to SST the mass media is an all-powerful entity run by the dominant class. As shown by previous researchers, white, upper class, men run the Web — the same persons portrayed in other media. If the assumptions of SST follow, as the Web gains in popularity and accessibility it will eventually merge into a format much the same as television, newspapers and radio today, with dominant ideas being broadcast by an elite few to the masses. These dominant ideas will follow the stereotypes surrounding gender in the media today, and may be powerful enough to conform women's Web zines into the form national women's magazines have today.

Contrary to this, although the majority of sites on the Web are run by men, women's zines are written and produced by women. Because women are the publishers, the SST assumption that the media portrays the views of a dominant minority cannot hold. The Web allows the ideas and opinions of anyone to be broadcast to millions.

Supposing SST's assumptions apply to the Web, it would follow that women's groups on the Web would begin to lose power, according to the logic of SST. As corporations and larger companies run by men take over the Web, women would begin to lose footing because they will feel their ideas are deviant. According to SST, as women begin to feel deviant they will discontinue expressing their opinions in order to avoid isolation. Because of the format of the Web, this might be in the form of a lack of visitors to women's sites. The public will converge on a few dominant sites run by a small

majority power. Eventually, women who once found power in the abundance of women's sites on the Web will lose that power and alter their opinions in order to fit in with the perceived norm.

SST dictates that women will conform to the standards portrayed in the mass media, because they will seek acceptance by the larger community. SST describes a media run by a dominant power that does not always portray the majority view. Although SST does not allow for choice in the original theory, SST's description of the media as an all-powerful, unchangeable force could be applied to the question of why women use the Web to get information they are not able to get in the broader media.

Researchers such as Salwen, Lin and Matera (quoted in Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 307), in their research of citizen's views on Official English, found that people were less likely to voice their opinions on an issue if their opinion differed from the perceived national opinion found in the mass media. This follows the theoretical assumptions of SST, that the media has the ability to present views that become the norm. Yet, the Web is an open forum of communication through which anyone can post information. Thus, such findings on the altering of public opinion may not be valid when looking at the Web. A mass of opinion can be found on the Web, so no one dominant opinion will necessarily prevail. No channels automatically arise on a Web user's screen unless they are programmed in, reflecting choice on the part of the viewer.

In the case of women's zines, each zine presents its individual take on feminist issues. All women's zines do not necessarily provide the same information or opinions. A person searching these sites would not be likely to find a consistent portrayal of opinions or issues to which they could conform. There is not likely to be a majority view on the issue.

In addition, previous studies of SST have focused on the media available in the form of television and radio. Noelle Neumann's original study looked at the Nazi regime's ability to convince the German people to follow its ideas. She found that people changed their ideas about Hitler's politics as the national opinion changed. But, during the time of these scholars there were very few media choices. The Web presents hundreds of new "channels" to the public. In this light, Noelle Neumann's theory may or may not hold. Larger corporations, such as Microsoft and MSNBC, are defining new ways of Web use. These corporations, especially MSNBC, are merely an extension of the already powerful television and news corporations. According to SST, these news corporations could bring their values and media to the Web to perpetuate the same effect. But, Web viewers would still be required to type in the address of these sites before they view them, and can easily link away from them to a non-mainstream site, hence implying choice in consumption. Simpson (1996) points out that people maintained their original values, and merely reformatted them as times changed. This criticism of SST shows that people may have the potential to maintain their own value system, but make it more palpable for a new time, or in this case a new medium.

Noelle-Neumann does allow room for public opinion to change in her theory, but not without the help of the all-powerful mass media. Cragan and Shields (1998) state "...a minority viewpoint can never become a majority viewpoint without the persistent help of the mass media, which are either naturally sympathetic or authoritatively powerful" (p. 264). Along these lines, one might conclude that the feminist view may become the majority with the help of the media that is the Web. The problem with this assumption is the question of why the feminist view would become the majority through the Web as opposed to any other of the many views broadcast on the Web. If persistence were the key to majority opinion, surely pornography would win over feminism for numbers of

actual sites. In order for viewers to take in the information given on women's zines, they must go to these sites of their own accord. Women's zines will not pop up on the screen and remain there for the duration of a program, which is the case in television and radio.

As shown in the content analysis, women's zines mix fashion and feminism into one enticing package. "Though *Maxi* does make room for stories on, for instance, the return of Candie's slides, its primary thrust is more political, and its editors are unafraid to express old school feminist rage" (France, 1997, p. 101). This disguise of feminism hidden within a colorful media package of a women's magazines allows the zines to make the political palatable for younger women who are removed from the early feminist debate. The success of these magazines may feed a new majority opinion of the younger generation, who may in turn demand such information from other forms of media. The more successful these zines become, the more likely the media will support their views.

The foundations of SST are useful. People approach the Web as a new medium, but not as a first medium. Users bring to the Web the expectations and experiences of past media use such as television, radio and print. In addition to these, users bring socially constructed ideas of reality that affect the way they perceive and hence use the Web.

From a feminist perspective, SST allows the researcher room to take these things into consideration and analyze why users' behavior is as perceived from both a historical and social constructionist viewpoint.

Uses and Gratifications theory fits nicely into looking at how people use the Web as a mass medium. Unlike television and radio, which can be turned on while doing other things, the Web is interactive. Most computers will go offline or "to sleep" if not used after a certain period of time. If women are using the Web, they must actively turn on their computer and choose which information they want to view. There is no "auto-pilot" for browsing the Web. The closest thing to leaving a television station on for a period of

time on the Web is a group of sites that are inter-linked.

UGT is an action theory. This means it assumes that the user plays an active role in what she consumes. This allows the researcher to look at what women are getting from the Web and why they are using the Web to get that information. The Web provides a different kind of women's information than television or radio. As an open-access medium, anyone can post anything on the Web. Although this brings in a certain amount of clutter, and in essence "bad programming," this allows women to talk about things that may not be accepted on national television and radio. Subjects like homosexuality and abortion have proven explosive in the national media in recent years, yet such subjects are common on the Web and in women's Web zines. UGT could not be used to research why women feel comfortable discussing these issues on the Web, and what they wish to achieve from these discussions, because it does not address such issues.

One criticism of the Uses and Gratifications approach is that it assumes that people know what they "need." "It [UGT] is still a somewhat mechanistic functional model, presuming that an individual will recognize her own needs and will seek a rational way to satisfy them. Why it is, for example, that one turns to media instead of other means to satisfy the need for entertainment, information or relaxation remains unclear," (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 36). If women are choosing to read women's zines, we must ask not only what they are seeking to fulfill, but why they are using the Web for this fulfillment. Does the Web replace national women's magazines, or is it used in addition to them? What are the perceived needs these women feel they are fulfilling? Are these basic needs or mass-mediated needs?

Van Zoonen also argues that UGT focuses too much on the personal, psychological aspects of the viewer, which leads researchers to ignore broader social contexts. For instance, how much of perceived needs are culturally bound in the first place? The

problem with such a question lies in the presumption of society's role in dictating people's needs. From a social constructionist standpoint, society creates our "reality," but much of this view is imbedded in the SST approach to the media, not UGT (1994, p. 38).

Klapper (1963) states, "...if uses and gratifications studies are to achieve their potentialities they must, I believe, proceed further along the road on which many of them have stopped. They must consider not only the observed use, but the consequences of that use for the individual user, for social groups and for society at large" (p. 520). This statement addresses the problem van Zoonen points out. Despite the functional focus of UGT, researchers cannot look only at what people are using, but why and how this affects society. This view may be more useful in UGT than delving into the influences of patriarchal society.

Rubin's first assumption in UGT states, "Communication behavior such as media use is typically goal directed or motivated. Such behavior is functional for people; it has consequences for people and societies" (1993, p. 98). This assumption works well in the context of women's zines. Women choose the sites they wish to read, and get the information they want from them. Zines provide opinions different from broader society and allow women to use those opinions in any way they wish. Women choose the articles on the pages of zines they wish to read and can skip articles they do not find interesting.

More difficult in its application to women's use of Web zines is the second assumption that, "People select and use communication sources and messages to satisfy felt needs and desires. Media use is a means to satisfy wants or interests such as seeking information to reduce uncertainty or to solve personal dilemmas" (Rubin, 1993, p. 98). Here the theory does not go further to explain from where these needs are derived. Why are women reading these zines? Why do they feel there is a need to find out more about

feminist ideas? Why do some young women prefer web zines to television?

The third assumption, "Social and psychological factors mediate communication behavior. Behavior is a response to media only as filtered through one's social and psychological circumstances such as the potential for interpersonal interaction, social categories and personality." Rubin (1993, p. 98) argues a limited-effects type model of the media. That is, women get what they need from zines only if they need something, otherwise they will not be swayed. If a woman is searching for an answer about a topic, and she finds an answer that is satisfying to her, she will stop at that answer. If a woman does not need an answer, she may not be swayed. This assumption implies that society and psychology mediate how a person will respond to media, but again it leaves no explanation for why those social factors exist in the first place.

The fourth assumption works well in the framework of women's zines. "Media compete with other forms of communication for selection, attention and use. There are definite relationships between media and interpersonal communication for satisfying needs or wants," (Rubin, 1993, p. 98). Women must direct themselves to choose the Web as a form of media. They choose this instead of television, radio or a social setting. Women must be self-directed on the Web. The process of surfing is an active rather than passive one.

The fifth assumption in UGT states, "People are usually more influential than media in media-person relationships," (p. 98). The question here lies in how personal some Web sites can be. Users can write to the editors easily through email and establish a relationship. Many zines are published by one or two people and are written on a very personal level. Thus, how are relationships established through the computer different than those established face to face?

CONCLUSION

Spiral of Silence theory and Uses and Gratifications theory dictate two distinct approaches to the mass media. Perhaps the largest distinction lies in the way each theory views the audience. SST's audience is passive, while UGT's audience is active. Each of these views is useful in looking at women's zines on the Web. By viewing the media as a dominant entity, SST allows researchers to explain why feminism is not prevalent in the media today. It also includes a framework through which it is possible to see feminism become more prevalent on the Web. Perhaps most importantly, SST provides an interesting twist when looking at zines that profess not only feminism but also mass media ideals. SST would explain this combination of feminism and mass media as an emergence of new trends through persistence on the part of feminists.

SST states that minority groups must use the Web to gain attention and success in society. The drawback of this is that SST mandates that women's issues are totally dependent on the mass media. If women's zines were to disappear from the Web, SST would propose that the general public would no longer side with these issues. SST describes a public that is entirely dependent on the media for socially acceptable opinion. The theory does not leave room for individual thought or action, or opinions based on personal experience. The activist is not a central figure in SST, unless they are pursuing the media for attention. SST also does not leave room in the theory for the creation of new media. SST focuses strictly on the main mass media structure of television, radio and print.

UGT's audience, on the other hand, is entirely active. UGT purports that audience members choose what media they want to consume based on a set of needs they wish to fulfill. UGT allows the researcher to look more broadly at the Web as a medium of choice, and then narrow down to what is being used by which user. The make-up of the

Web itself fits nicely into this theory, because the researcher can easily see that users log on to the Web seeking something (entertainment, products, information) and log off once they feel their needs have been fulfilled. UGT also allows the researcher to look at the Web from a user's financial standpoint. This theory can be useful in defining the audience that already has been shown to be predominantly male, upper class and perhaps most importantly, has access to a computer. Such information is important when looking at women on the Web. UGT gives a framework for seeing which women are using computers and why, by allowing the researcher to look at which media individual users are consuming to fulfill certain needs.

Although UGT fails in explaining the feminist framework of a dominant, patriarchally controlled society, it does allow researchers the opportunity to look at why women are reading zines on the Web and how this action affects society at large. The theory does not allow for the influence of culture and society on the users and how they perceive their needs, but it does allow the viewers to simply have needs.

These theories each take an individual approach to explaining mass media. Although researchers who look at how the mass media affects viewers may find SST condemning in its approach to the audience, other researchers may find UGT useful for its functional approach, but difficult in explaining why people homogenize their opinions.

Theory, just as media, is evolving with technology. New theory has always emerged alongside new technology as researchers adjust their way of thinking about and studying a new phenomenon. But, researchers need not reinvent the wheel by throwing out old theories and starting from scratch. Theories developed around older technologies provide a useful framework for looking at both human action and understanding the social-historical context with which people approach new technology. On the other hand, older theories must be adjusted and analyzed before they can be applied to new forms of media.

As shown through the short content analysis in this paper, women use the Web to combine different aspects of the media that are found in the current media, but not from a single source. Women are producing zines that not only discuss the aspects of beauty and fashion found in women's printed magazines but also social issues that are present in the media, but only in small amounts in mainstream magazines.

A new theoretical framework for studying how women use the Web should take into consideration the user-driven interface that the Web provides. Action theory ideas from UGT apply here, in that Web users must seek out information and make conscious use choices. But in addition to this, researchers must look at the socially constructed ideas about the media these women bring with them when they come to the Web. As shown in the content analysis, the women publishing zines on the Web are not producing new ideas, but rather combining old ones into a new form.

I propose that women use the Web to create new combinations of media, by combining those aspects of existing media they feel will fulfill their needs. Thus, women have a perceived set of needs, but these needs are socially constructed through both the media and society. In looking at how women use the Web, and what they do with it, researchers must take a holistic approach, in that they must look at both the interface the women are using (in this case the Web) and the historical and social aspects of how women have used other media in the past, and what other media have provided for that audience.

Recommendations

I propose four assumptions that lay the framework for a new theory with which to analyze the web. First, women create their own media as well as take in media that are provided through the mainstream. This is shown through women's historical use of the media and zines. This is also shown in traditional women's magazines, which as

explained, provide a distorted view of women.

Second, the different, more user-driven interface of the Web allows women to take a more active role in creating media for themselves. By publishing on the Web, women's zines can reach potentially more viewers than print. The Web also provides a user-driven interface where users can choose from a larger variety of opinions and ideas than available in the mainstream media.

Third, socially constructed ideas about media affect the information that women produce in their own media. As shown in the short content analysis, women do not create new ideas in their Web zines but rather combine existing ideas into a new format, in differing quantities. Women use formats similar to women's magazines in their Web zines, and also use slang found in printed magazines. Women take these ideas and are expanding them to create their own media.

And finally, the Web provides a new technology through which women can change not only the information that is published for them, but also the way they interact with the media. Women can use the Web to create new media and interact with others who do the same. The Web provides instant communication, which changes the way researchers study its use.

In this study, I have shown how women use the World Wide Web as a way to discuss issues that are not abundant in printed magazines. I have shown that such a phenomenon is common from the historical perspective of media use. I have also shown that existing mass media theories are useful in beginning a study of the web, but must be expanded in order to effectively study the Web as a new mass medium. The framework above is only a step in evaluating new ways of researching the Web as a mass medium. As the Web evolves, so must the theories that are being used in its study.

Suggestions for Future Research

Upon completion of this study, I would like to suggest some ideas for future research.

First, a thorough Uses and Gratifications study of the readers of women's Web zines would provide useful insights for developing a new theory. Although the logistics of conducting a reliable survey of Web users is difficult, this information would provide additional insights into what satisfaction women are getting from the Web. Such a study would also provide information about the limitations of Uses and Gratifications theory.

Second, a study on advertising in women's Web zines might provide information into the future of these publications and how these ads affect users. Advertising plays an important role in the economic life of any publication, and it can affect the content of publications. As more women's Web zines become commercial, the question arises as to what control, if any, Web zine editors will have over advertising.

Figure 1: Percentages of article subject matter in women's printed magazines and women's zines.

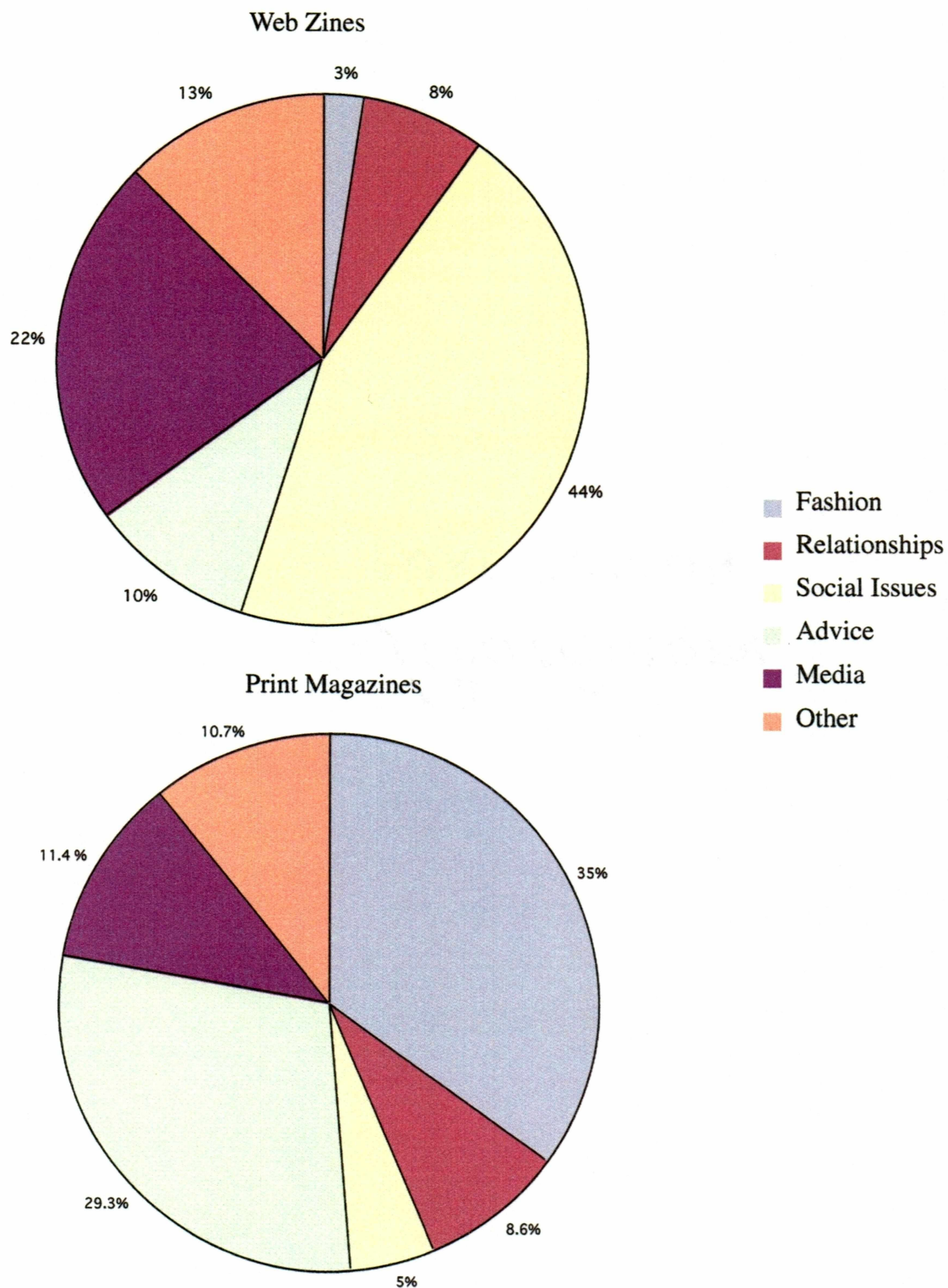


Figure 2: Selected headlines from women's printed magazines and women's zines.

Women's Printed Magazines

Does He Secretly Love You?

Quick, Painless Makeup Switches to Give You This Year's Prettiest Face

50 Tricks for Outstanding Orgasms

Fashion Finishing School

How to be Smart with your Heart

Cosmo Quiz: Are Your Guy Standards Too High?

199 Spring Best Buys

Breakup Girl to the Rescue

I Could Have Been Executed

Leo's (Dicaprio) New Leading Lady

You, You, You, Beauty

The Get Ahead Guide to Jobs and Money

Calvin's Color

Mellow Drama

Best Face Forward

Guys Confess the Surprising Complement they Crave

Women's Online Zines

Miss America Y2K and a Woman in Duck's Clothing

Norplant Litigation and Skirts are Banned

The Intricate Art of Abusing Power: One Woman's Experience With Sexual Harassment

Better Half: Pie in the Sky and My Unemployed Guy

Behind the Apron: Beth Pav

Your Guide to the Fat Chick Store

Finding Xiu Xiu: Actress/Director Talks About her Directional Debut

Sex and the Dean: Pornography and the Divinity School

Treasure Chest: Breasts Can Be Powerful Things

5 Smart Girls Talk Power

Sorry, the Commonwealth's Full of Lesbians

Star Wars, Farts Memories

House Huntin Hell

Rocking for Christ

APPENDIX I

Example cover pages from women's printed magazines and women's online zines from March 2000.

COSMOPOLITAN

MAY 2008

Supersize Your Sex Life

Take Home 10 Tasty Tips From the World's Lustiest Lovers. Trust Us, He'll Never Get His Fill of You

Make His Love Last

4 Sneaky Ways to Melt a Man's Heart

Spring Looks Under \$50—\$100—\$200

The Cutest, Coolest Must-Have Clothes

Massage Him, Knead Him, Totally Please Him

Three Magical Things Your Fingers Can Do... and It's Not What You Think

Guys Confess the Surprising Compliment They Crave

"I Threw Her Panties in His Face"

True Stories of Women Who Lost All Control in Public

The Gyno Crisis Every Woman Dreads

What to Do If It Happens to You

www.cosmomag.com

\$3.99



0 451 06230 1

fashion, beauty, sex & love, life, friends, health, work, & all new web sites!

Mademoiselle

mar 2000

Bonus Pullout
45 SEXY NEW HAIRSTYLES

Makeup News:
Brighter, Bolder, Prettier!
 Perfect Colors for Your Skin Tone

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE 65 YEARS OF
 HOT STYLE, SMART
 ADVICE, PLUS A FEW
 GOOD GAFFES
 FROM THE PAST

How to Fall in Love
 (Not on Your Face)

Courteney on David: Guess What? She's the Messy One

225

SPRING FASHION HITS
 Look Rich! Rock Out! Get Cute! The Best New Clothes, Shoes & Accessories

FREE BRAIN UPGRADE INSIDE!
 6 Ways to Unleash Your Inner Genius

U.S.A. \$7.99
 Canada \$8.99
 Foreign \$11.99






GLAMOUR

Supersize Spring Special!

50 Tricks for Outstanding Orgasms

- NC-17 Seduction Moves
- Applause-Worthy Foreplay

1999 Best Spring Buys

Top Trends, Figure Flatterers
(No Size Discrimination)

Plus \$5,000 Win-a-Wardrobe Contest

Sex Solo—He Does It, Do You?
Women's Private Pleasure Poll Results

Quick, Painless Makeup Switches To Give You This Year's Prettiest Face

Leo's (DiCaprio) New Leading Lady
Beach Star Virginie Ledoyen

Does He Secretly Love You?
The Ways Men Show It When They're Not Ready to Speak It

MEDICAL REPORT: "Doctors Removed Both My Breasts, But I Didn't Have Cancer"

USA \$4.99
CANADA \$5.99
AUSTRALIA \$6.99

0 357072 1

E-mail the editors at Maxi!

The Woodstock rapists should bear full responsibility, say our poll respondents.

Is oral sex *really* sex? Teens don't

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::enlighten::

scoop:: Norplant litigation and skirts are banned!

poll:: Ever been stalked?
Photographed against your will?

consume:: Great women!
A new approach to trading cards.

ask maxi:: Eat, drink, mope, be miserable?

Ask Maxi ponders post-breakup therapy.

smile and act nice

news home life food sex

if you can't say anything nice...
discussion forums

submit stories or suggestions

GALLERY

chatbox

Saturday,
March 25
Taxing.

This year, why not get your taxes out of the way early? If you're just filing an EZ, use

It'll take you about a half an hour, and if you opt for direct deposit, you could get your refund in as little as two weeks (but the closer we get to the deadline, the longer you can expect it to take).



Photo by

YOUR ASS HERE.

your pictures or drawings—anything female & (preferably with no background. We'll give you a credit & a link.

NEW THURSDAY

Kids on (legal) drugs and Internet voting, that's what. Also, Louisa censures the Census.

PREVIOUSLY

Salon.com's CEO Michael O'Donnel spoke at SXSW and Louisa was there. His speech was supposed to tout content as king, but instead it made her mad. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Managing the modern marriage when your husband is out of work. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#) Need advice in the marriage department? Miss Priss can help. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Jen outlines the female nominees & offers her picks. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#) Still trying to figure out what you were supposed to be when you grew up? Lois is back with another career your kindergarten teacher forgot to mention. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Lauren tries to read the paper. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#) Introducing **Behind the Apron**, our new series spotlighting female chefs, featuring two sensual recipes from Chef Beth Pav. *iced Sea Oysters on the Half Shell with Rice Wine Vinegar* and *Frozen Black and White Truffles*. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]\[5\]](#) Shutting Wendy Huber unleashes *Neverneverland*, a vibrant color photo exhibit. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Throw away those haute cuisine pretensions and simmer up a pot of good old fashioned meat sauce. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Sad or sick, these make you feel better. Jen's mom shares two favorite recipes. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Keep your resolutions and go shopping, too! [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Next time you doom the mother of that screaming toddler in the supermarket, remember: misbehaving is what toddlers do best. With soundtrack. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Too big, too small, just right? Our 12-pair series on boots. Titty Titty Bang Bang! [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]](#)

Her boyfriend's chair is an eyesore. Does it stay or go? You decide.

Choose a thought bubble for more stories in that section



mightybig

2000-03-02
Mighty Carpet Ride

popcult

2000-03-04
A lesson in
Christian Rock

lawyer

2000-03-03
Immigration and Law

wing chun

2000-03-02
Whisper your
highness

glad

2000-03-01
Mighty Glad is
heaven, what the hell
is that?

about

2000-03-22
Welcome J.A. Rose!

MIGHTYBIGTV

WE'RE THE OPPOSITE OF THAT.

YOU'RE ENTITLED TO OUR OPINION

“My favorite: just added the Wu Yang Clan to the neighborhood.”



Sorry, the Commonwealth's all full of lesbians!

Those who say low conquests all haven't run into British and Canadian immigration officers yet.



Close to Bernadette: is that a posse in your pants or are you just happy to see me?

Warning! This story about Bernadette's sexualization may contain the words 'Anti Leaky' or 'Bernadette's'.



Hooking for Christ

How can someone who has risen to the heights of stardom, in order to obtain the largest possible audience for the message of Christ's good news, actually be humble enough to lead by example?



Keep your shirt on!

It's Mardi Gras season and here's a few tips for all you maggots -- I mean, well-paying tourists we locals love and respect -- who'll want to come and enjoy all that New Orleans has to offer.



The Talented Mr. Ripley Reviewer

It's never too late to debunk a critical favorite, even and Wing Chun team up for a be said/she said review of The Talented Mr. Ripley



Star Wars, Farts, Memories.

Take a trip down memory lane won't you? Turn the clock back to 1998 when the world was young and Clark wasn't getting come and desert letters.



House Martin's Hell

Imagine your worst apartment search experience. Now imagine that times one-thousand. Welcome to San Francisco.



Derision, Heal Thyself!

The bandage only comes in that tawny-rust color. Sure, it would blend into my skin tone -- if I were made out of Georgia red clay, or if I were Thing from the Fantastic Four.



Your Guide to the Fat Chick Store

It is not all right to work out the size 38 just for the purpose of opening it up like a big bag and snickering at its ludicrous proportions when compared to your own sixteen-year-old frame.



No net baked goods! Hoked back!

The Old seems turn Zola into a feverish addict but that's just the way the cookies crumble.



Arbitratory Arguments for Citizens' Arrest

Righteous anger runs in the family as Wing's Pa sports off on a newly discovered major piece of big city life: Jaywalkers.



DISTANCE LEARNING

What are the best programs?

AGAN, GANDE It's all about Wacky

THE BULLS It's all about Toque, baby!



I am anticipating the addition of Tonal Assessment to MightyBig stuff with

- ☐ trepidation
- ☐ glee
- ☐ envy

Vote

Favourite non-car form of transportation

train 1.0%

subway 1.0%

taxi 0%

rollerblades 4%

skateboard 3%

hovercraft 11%

the courtesy of my two feet 58%

Total votes: 253

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